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ABSTRACT

A guide for using language contrasts to understand and teach pronunciation differences in English and Spanish proposes that all languages are learned in basically the same order, phonetics (listening and speaking) and graphemics (reading and writing). Language can be broken down so that understandable elements (phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon) may be observed. Predictable areas of pronunciation difficulty are looked at, especially in cases where English has more phonemes than Spanish. Specific vowels and consonants occurring in English but not in Spanish are reviewed, noting Spanish-speakers' pronunciation tendencies and listing minimal pairs in which problems commonly occur. Notable structural (morphological, syntactical, and idiomatic) differences between the two languages are also outlined. (MSE)

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ENGLISH — SPANISH CONTRASTS

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

by Cecilio Orozco, Ph.D.

ALL LANGUAGES ARE LEARNED BASICALLY IN THE SAME ORDER

PHONETICS

Listening/Comprehension: The very young first associate words or utterances with experiences or concrete objects. A man without a tongue can learn this level of language and operate in that environment. He understands language items. Everyone's listening/comprehension skill exceeds his or her speaking skill (or vocabulary). One may be "bilingual" if he has skills in two languages at this level, *one does not have to speak to be* "bilingual."

Speaking:* This is the act of IMITATING the corresponding sounds which have been previously learned at the listening/comprehension level. If you hear "she-can" instead of "chicken," you will say "she-can" when the gallinaceous species is present. For that matter, you will also say "she-can" when you later are asked to read the word. What is so sacred about the spelling? Consider *Ch*icago or *Ch*arlotte. Speaking is learned (right and/or wrong) through *practice*; much like basketball, which is also a physical skill. *Bilinguals lack in practice.*

GRAPHEMICS

Reading: This is the act of decoding symbols into sounds. *The sounds (words) must be known at the previous two levels* (understanding and speaking). If you don't pronounce them "right" you will very likely reflect that when you read. English speakers will inject their own "R" when trying to read:

Erre con erre cigarro, erre con erre barril , ¡Rápidos corren los carros, cargados de azúcar, al ferrocarril! (Did you try it? It's like trying to read "chicken" when you have always said "she-can.")

Writing: The act of transferring sounds (words) into symbols which are to be decoded by a speaker of the language. Writing is to reading like speaking is to listening/comprehension; both *require practice.* Why would anyone write "betting" when he was dictated the word "bedding"? Why would I write "Da escul is on da mein estrit"?

LANGUAGE CAN BE BROKEN DOWN SO THAT UNDERSTANDABLE ELEMENTS MAY BE OBSERVED

Phonology: The sound system of the language. English has more sounds than Spanish. Students will have to learn to produce NEW sounds when learning English. Spanish has one sound not found in English (R), this sound, however, does not produce a minimal pair when used in place of its English counterpart. No change of meaning occurs when the Spanish "r" is used in place of the English "r." The Spanish "R," or "soft" or "single tap" is basically the same sound in English words such as "bedding" or "wedding" or, for that matter, "betting" or "wetting." . . . Food for a lot of jokes, hey?

Morphology (Grammar): The changes that occur to words to alter their meaning. Mary, a proper noun, becomes a possessive adjective through a morphological change, thus: *Mary's* book. The same change on the noun "chair" makes it plural (chairs) without altering its grammatical "label." Spanish and English morphological contrasts can shed much light on the difficulties of learning English that the Spanish speaker experiences.

Syntax (Grammar): The order or sequence in which the words appear in a particular language to carry the semantic value. "Ain't" the same, "The dogs bit me" as "The bit dogs me" (As one horse might say to another). Spanish has unique syntax variants.

Lexicon: The inventory of words a person has. We have a much more ample lexical inventory at the listening/comprehension level than at the speaking level. Words are learned through practice, like basketball. I KNOW basketball, I UNDERSTAND basketball, but . . . you ought to see me play it! Many "bilinguals," because of the practice necessary to become bilingual, lack this *practice* in either or both of the languages.

Semantics: The value that a particular group of speakers gives to its lexical items. All "idiomatic" expressions fall under this category. Any expression that is "idiomatic" in one language is also idiomatic in the other. See E.R.I.C. publication #ED 047 575 "1000 SPANISH IDIOMS" by J. Dale Miller (it's also 1000 English idioms).

CONTRASTING SPANISH AND ENGLISH

Let us look first at the minimal but vital area of contrast between Spanish and English at the phonological level. English has more sounds than Spanish. All teachers of Chicanos must know this, *predictable*, area of possible trouble.

Vowel Sounds of English not Found in Spanish

"Short I" (ɪ) like the middle sound of the word "pit" (also written "ĭ"). If not mastered prior to reading can cause great problems because it can be spelled in so many ways: i in "it," ie in "sieve," e in "England," ee in "been," o in "women," u in "busy," a in "village," y in "hymn," or ui in "build"!

"A/E" Digraph (æ) like the middle sound of the word "pat" (also written "ă"). Spelled a in "hat" but ai in "plaid."

"SCHWA" (ə) like in the word "cup" (also written "ŭ"). This one has many spellings: u in "cup," o in "son," ou in "couple," oo in "flood," a in "along," oe in "does," ai in "mountain," ia in "parliament," e in "system," ei in "mullein," eo in "dungeon," i in "easily" and oi in "porpoise"!

Open O (ɔ) like in the word "raw" (also written "ŏ"). Spelled: oa in "broad," ou in "ought," a in "tall" ah in "Utah," al in "talk," au in "fault," and a as in our example, "raw."

There are many other vowel sounds and combinations likely to cause problems such as the minimal pairs "pull and pool" or "full and fool" etc. The largest number of minimal pairs or pairs of words likely to cause problems of meaning through vowel-sound confusion are related to the aforementioned four sounds.

Needless to say, when reading, the *spelling* problems of these sounds further confuse a child learning yet to master the sounds.

Sample Vowel Problem-Pairs for Spanish Speakers

/ æ / VS /e/

both sound like →

pan	pen
mass	mess
vast	vest
and	end
sad	said

/i/ VS /ɪ/

both sound like →

mitt	meat
sit	seat
hit	heat
fill	feel
grit	greet
been	bean

/ə/ VS /ɑ/

both sound like →

nut	not
cup	cop
hut	hot
duck	dock
luck	lock
color	collar

/ɔ/ VS /O/

both sound like →

raw	row
law	low
taught	tote
chalk	choke
craw	crow
lawn	loan

See minimal pairs which contrast not only the four English vowel sounds not found in Spanish with the Spanish sounds but also the new sounds with each other.

CONSONANT SOUNDS OF ENGLISH NOT FOUND IN SPANISH

/b/ vs /v/: Spanish most frequently will use neither. The Spanish sound for both of these is somewhere between bilabial and labiodental. In normal speech in English one approximates this sound when combining /b/ and /v/ as in "I've been . . ." Spelling is a problem here also as /b/ can be written with "b" as in "*b*ed" or with bb as in "ro*bb*er" and /v/ is v in "*v*isit" but vv in "fli*vv*er," f in "*of*" and ph in "Ste*ph*en"!

/s/ vs /z/: American Spanish seldom uses the /z/ (voiced) sound preferring the unvoiced /s/ fricative and, in no case do they contrast meaning as they do in English. /s/ can be spelled with s in "*s*eem," ss in "lo*ss*," sc in "*sc*ene," sch in "*sch*ism," c in "*c*ity" and ce in "mi*ce*." /z/ is spelled with z in "*z*one," zz in "da*zz*le," s in "ha*s*," ss in "sci*ss*ors," sc in "di*sc*ern" and x in "Xer*x*es"!

/š/ (sh) vs /č/ (ch): Spanish uses mainly the /č/ but regions prefer the /š/. These sounds are always spelled "ch" in Spanish and never contrast meaning as in English. In fact the "ch" is considered a digraph or letter in Spanish and found in the dictionaries after C. Now for the English use of these two sounds; they are differentiators of *meaning* and the spelling problems are many. /š/ is spelled sh in "*sh*ip," ce in "o*ce*an," ch in "ma*ch*ine," ci in "spe*ci*al," psh in "*psh*aw," su in "*su*gar," sch in "*sch*ist," sci in "cons*ci*ence," se in "nau*se*ous," si in "man*si*on," ss in "tis*s*ue," ssi in "mis*si*on" and ti in "men*ti*on"! Some problem, hey? About /č/, we can hardly call it the "ch" when we know that it can be spelled not only ch as in "*ch*eap" but also tch in "pa*tch*," te in "right*e*ous," ti in "ques*ti*on" and tu in "na*tu*ral"!

/-ϕ/ (Final Nothing) vs /-d/ (Final /d/ Sound): An interesting pair in that one of the three regular past endings in English is made by adding a /d/ sound at the end of the verb as in lived while in Spanish, words ending in d maintain their meaning even if it is not prononced. Examples: /salú/ vs /salud/, /usté/ vs /usted/ etc., these words are prounounced often without the /d/ sound. So "live" and "lived" sound alike to a Spanish speaker. The spelling has a tendency to correct this as the child learns to read and write.

Other phonological sounds in the consonant series can be identified although the number of problems they cause is limited because the number of contrasting items (therefore, the risk) is minimal.

/ɵ-/ (Initial th): Neither voiced nor voiceless is found in Spanish. The intervocalic d of Spanish words does give us a th sound in the middle of words. Consider Spanish "dedo" "de(th)o."

/ǰ/: This is the sound of ch in "Greenwi*ch*," of d in "gra*d*uate," of dg in "ju*dg*ement," of dge in "bri*dge*," of di in "sol*di*er," of g in "ma*g*ic," of gg in "exa*gg*erated" or of j in *j*ust"! Spanish speakers would tend to register this sound as ch thus confusing Gina with *Ch*ina. This sound cannot be written in Spanish. Radio and TV, however, have introduced Italian pronunciations and presently Latin America uses /ǰ/ widely for words derived from the Italian.

/r/ (English r): Spelled r in "*r*ed," rr in "ca*rr*ot" or rh in "*rh*ythm." This sound does not contrast meanings when

pronounced as an /R/ in Spanish. Have you heard Ricardo Montalván selling "Corrdovas"?

/s-/ (**Initial s**): Spanish speakes have a tendency to add an /e/ when the initial s is part of a *blend* such as st in "*st*reet," sk in "*sk*ate," sp in "*sp*ecial" etc., so we hear "estreet," "eskate," "especial" etc. No contrast in meaning, however, is produced.

Sample Consonant Problem-Pairs for Spanish Speakers

/b/ VS /v/

sound alike ⟷

base	vase
best	vest
bat	vat
bet	vet
boat	vote
berry	very

/s/ VS /z/

sound alike ⟷

price	prize
sip	zip
bus	buzz
loose	lose
rice	rize
sing	zing

/š/ vs /č/

sound alike ⟷

shin	chin
shop	chop
share	chair
sheep	cheap
shoe	chew
shows	chose

/-o/ vs /-d/

sound alike ⟷

mine	mind
love	loved
live	lived
dial	dialed
follow	followed
clean	cleaned

/ɵ-/ voiced vs /d-/

sound alike ⟷

those	doze
they	day
there	dare
then	den
thine	dine
though	dough

/ɵ-/ silent vs /d-/

sound alike ⟷

threw	drew
thin	din
thirty	dirty
thigh	die
thrive	drive
thum	dum

Teachers should look up other combinations and expand these lists into more extensive and appropriate teaching components. These should, whenever possible, reflect the vocabularies to be found by the student in his reading materials.

SOME STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPANISH AND ENGLISH

MORPHOLOGICAL

Contractions: Spanish has only two formally contracted pairs. A + EL (to the) become AL and DE + EL (of the) become DEL. English has formalized many of these and in English both forms are correct. One can say "I have been working" or use the contracted form "I've been working."

Possessive: Spanish and English have one parallel form. Spanish "El libro de José" means basically the same as "The book of Joseph." English, however, uses this form more often when making biblical references. When using vernacular or in practical everyday situations, English prefers its unique apostrophized form "Joseph's book," a form which is not of Spanish.

Questions: Spanish forms its questions as in English by inflection of the voice or by moving the subject to a position after the verb. No problem here: "¿Tiene Raúl un lápiz?" and "Has Raul a pencil?" English, however, has an *additional* form for its emphatic statements and questions in the popular language: "Raul *does have* a pencil," which becomes "*Does* Raul *have* a pencil?" The dual form of the verb (has and does have) are not found in Spanish.

Gender: English does not use gender with things. "The book is mine," leaves something (gender) out for the Spanish speaker so he puts it in: "The book *he* is mine." The word "the" must now take the place of the Spanish speaker's selection of *el, la, los* and *las*.

SYNTACTICAL

Negation: Spanish demands a negative word before the verb. It can be "No tengo nada" or "Nada tengo" but you cannot have the English "I have no bananas." . . . It comes out "I no

have no bananas." "I no have a pencil" stems from that Spanish need for a negative before the verb which English does not have.

Adjectives: English "keeps you in suspense" waiting for the noun as it describes it: "The wooly, short-snouted, monstrous, brownish (and finally) animal" while Spanish gives us the noun and *then* describes it, thus: "El *caballo* blanco, bronco y valiente."

IDIOMATIC

As with all languages, each group of users gives value to its lexical items and utterances. Spanish and English many, many times express the same sentiment with different words or groups of words. We must be careful as we address ourselves to this area so as not to assume that two items are the same simply because the books use them as equals. Often the best way is to listen to how the people use the expressions. "You better put (*pay* in English) attention." A good start for your own regional list may be a look at ERIC Publication #ED 047 575 "1000 Spanish Idioms" by J. Dale Miller (It's also 1000 *English* Idioms).

*Most languages of the world end here, they have no writing system.

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